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## Islamist Political Activism In Jordan: Moderation, Militancy, And Democracy

By: **Curtis R. Ryan**

### Abstract

While democracy has proven to be a fragile and elusive form of politics in the modern Arab world, Islamist movements have flourished -- ranging from grass-roots pro-democracy activism to militant jihadism and terrorism. Whether Arab politics witnesses more political liberalization in the near future will depend in large part on the nature of Islamist movements, as well as ruling regimes' reactions to them. This article examines the broad range of Islamist alternatives within one of the more liberalizing Arab states -- the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan -- with a view to understanding the depth and breadth of Islamist forms of political mobilization.

**Ryan, C.R.** (2008). Islamist Political Activism In Jordan: Moderation, Militancy, And Democracy. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 12 (2) June 2008: 1-13. Publisher version of record available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/ISLAMIST-POLITICAL-ACTIVISM-IN-JORDAN-%3A-MODERATION-Ryan/d417524c3ac4d78427a8ff2a7636d4506c7b6f40>



## ISLAMIST POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN JORDAN: MODERATION, MILITANCY, AND DEMOCRACY

Curtis R. Ryan\*

*While democracy has proven to be a fragile and elusive form of politics in the modern Arab world, Islamist movements have flourished--ranging from grass-roots pro-democracy activism to militant jihadism and terrorism. Whether Arab politics witnesses more political liberalization in the near future will depend in large part on the nature of Islamist movements, as well as ruling regimes' reactions to them. This article examines the broad range of Islamist alternatives within one of the more liberalizing Arab states--the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan--with a view to understanding the depth and breadth of Islamist forms of political mobilization.*

The Islamist movement in Jordan has a history and heritage as old as that of the Hashemite regime itself. While Jordan's main Islamist political party--the Islamic Action Front (*Jabha al-Amal al-Islami* or IAF)--was not legalized until the early 1990s, Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) maintained a functional relationship with the Hashemite monarchy especially throughout the reign of King Hussein (1953-1999), who tolerated the *Ikhwan* as a loyal opposition. Indeed the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hashemite monarchy predates even the reign of King Hussein. Most strikingly, Islamist activism in Jordanian politics has for more than 60 years emphasized reform, moderation, and democratic participation, rather than revolution, radicalism, and militancy. Yet in November of 2005, militant Islamists affiliated with al-Qa'ida in Iraq carried out a series of deadly bombings in the capital, Amman. Within hours, Jordan's own Islamist movement had organized anti-al-Qa'ida demonstrations, condemning al-Qa'ida and militant Islamist terrorism. In doing so, Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists demonstrated the sharp--but too often underemphasized--difference between reformist and revolutionary approaches to Islamist activism.

This article examines the rise of the Islamist movement in Jordan, with emphasis

on the longstanding relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hashemite monarchy. It then moves on to study the move toward political liberalization in the latter years of King Hussein's reign and the corresponding shift within the Islamist movement toward legalized political party activism and electoral participation. Yet while Jordan's Islamist movement has, therefore, been overwhelmingly reformist rather than revolutionary, and democratically-minded rather than militant, there nonetheless remain alternative Islamist forces that focus on jihadi ideas. The article therefore also examines the rise of the Salafiyya movement in the kingdom as well as the impact of foreign (including al-Qa'ida) jihadists in militant confrontations with the Jordanian state and society. Finally, the article discusses the implications of the Hashemite regime's increasing emphasis on state security at the expense of political liberalization, and potentially at the expense of moderate forms of Islamism.

### THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN HASHEMITE JORDAN

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 in Egypt by the Islamist activist Hasan al-Banna. The organization quickly developed branches throughout the Arab world, calling for a reassertion of Islam into public life in

both government and society. While the Muslim Brotherhood established a presence in almost every Arab country, the individual organizations remained mainly autonomous, responding to local and national circumstances. In the case of Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood was established officially in the kingdom in 1945. From the very beginning, the Brotherhood made clear that its agenda was Islamist but not militant,

From the outset, the Muslim Brotherhood established a pattern of loyal opposition to the Hashemite regime. By emphasizing reform rather than revolution, the Brotherhood saw itself in partnership with the Jordanian state. As the regime consolidated its rule within Jordan, its moderate political positions, pro-Western foreign policy, and conservative monarchical institutions immediately served as a target for emerging Cold War ideological rifts, as well as emerging regional nationalist and revolutionary tensions. Thus from the perspective of the ruling regime, this *de facto*, if not *de jure*, relationship between the monarchy and its Islamist loyal opposition was intended in part to provide a counter to left-leaning secular oppositional trends ranging from Ba'thism to Nasserism to Communism.

While the regime attempted to curb leftist, secular, and pan-Arabist political tendencies, the monarchy simultaneously permitted its Islamist opposition to flourish. This allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to become by far the best organized group in the Jordanian opposition.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, the moderation of the Muslim Brotherhood also acted as a counter to more radical trends within Islamism, such as the Hizb al-Tahrir (Liberation Party) that had espoused a more revolutionary brand of Islamism, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup> In an effort to enhance its own Islamic credentials, the Hashemite regime continuously emphasized the direct lineage of the royal family from that of Muhammad. The Brotherhood too has at times emphasized this level of Islamic legitimacy, in contrast to the many secular, leftist, or nationalist regimes that emerged in the Arab world in neighboring Egypt, Iraq, and Syria.

and this drew the recognition of the state itself. In 1946, King Abdallah I officially recognized the Muslim Brotherhood as a charitable society in Jordan, and the king actually presided over the ceremony himself. Abdallah even included Muslim Brotherhood Secretary Abd al-Hakim al-Din in his governing cabinet, making this early linkage between the Brotherhood and the Hashemites institutionally clear.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond more direct political or governmental activism, however, the Muslim Brotherhood has taken very seriously its role as a charitable organization. With regime approval, the Brotherhood established the Islamic Center Charity Society in 1963, and was able to tap into funding generated from the oil economies of the wealthy and socially conservative Arab Gulf monarchies. For several decades now, the Brotherhood has presided over a range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Indeed, the only organization that patronizes and sponsors more social and charitable organizations is the Hashemite royal family itself. The Brotherhood, meanwhile, established across the country an array of schools and health clinics, including the Islamic Hospital in central Amman.<sup>4</sup>

While it is clear that relations between the Hashemites and the Brotherhood are almost as old as the Jordanian state itself, this does not mean that the two sides have always agreed. The Muslim Brotherhood did indeed support the monarchy through its wars with Israel, its foiling of various nationalist coup attempts, and even the Jordanian civil war between the Hashemite army and the guerrilla forces of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1970-1971. The Brotherhood walked a slightly finer line during the various political upheavals triggered by International Monetary Fund (IMF) economic austerity programs, such as the "bread riots" of 1989 and 1996.<sup>5</sup>

Yet at other times the Brotherhood has directly opposed Hashemite policies, even while maintaining its *de facto* status as loyal opposition. The Brotherhood adamantly opposed Anwar Sadat's separate peace treaty with Israel, for example, and viewed the

Hashemite regime as too mild in its own opposition to Sadat's move. When King Hussein resolutely stood by the shah of Iran in 1979 even as the Iranian Islamic Revolution swept the monarchy away, the Brotherhood again objected to the official Jordanian stance. This rift actually deepened following the 1980 Iraqi invasion of Iran, as Jordan supported Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist Iraq in its war with the Iranian revolutionary regime. For Hussein, the prospect of an Islamist movement successfully toppling a conservative pro-Western monarch was positively chilling. Yet for the brotherhood, opposing the only successful Islamist regime in the region was unconscionable.

In more contemporary politics, the major policy rift between the Islamist movement and the Hashemite state has centered on Jordan's own peace treaty with Israel signed in 1994. The Islamist movement adamantly opposed the treaty at the time, and in the years afterward its opposition only grew. The Brotherhood became a leading part of the broader "anti-normalization" movement in Jordan; if the opposition could not prevent the treaty, it could and did manage largely to prevent normalization of society-to-society relations. Since Islamists had tended to win democratic elections for the leadership positions within most of Jordan's professional associations (for doctors, engineers, lawyers, and pharmacists, for example), the Islamist movement was institutionally positioned to maintain its self-declared ban on working with Israeli counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

### **THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT, LIBERALIZATION, AND ELECTIONS**

Jordan's program of political liberalization began in earnest in 1989, as a direct response to widespread political unrest in the kingdom. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) economic austerity program, imposed in an attempt to improve the kingdom's declining economy, had triggered rioting throughout the country. The depth and breadth of the political upheaval had clearly shaken the regime itself, which responded with what amounted to

"defensive democratization."<sup>7</sup> King Hussein fired the unpopular Prime Minister Zayd al-Rifa'i, shuffled the governing cabinet, and announced the return of elections for parliament for the first time since martial law had been declared in the wake of the 1967 War with Israel. Jordan's political liberalization thereafter included several rounds of democratic parliamentary elections (1989, 1993, 1997, 2003, and 2007), the lifting of martial law (1991), legalization of political parties (1992), and several rounds of revisions regarding government control of media, press, and publications.<sup>8</sup> Given its longstanding relationship with the regime, and its status as virtually the only officially tolerated form of opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood was perfectly positioned to benefit from the new atmosphere of openness. As parliamentary and electoral life returned to the kingdom, the Brotherhood was able to capitalize on decades-worth of organization.

Yet beyond the Brotherhood, Jordan also has a long tradition of independent Islamist activism in addition to that of organized groups such as the Ikhwan, or their contemporary political party: the IAF. Independent Islamists have tended to resist joining organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, or parties like the IAF, which they often accuse of being co-opted by the regime. Among the most well-known independent Islamist activists is the outspoken Layth Shubaylat, who was among those independents serving in the 1989-1993 parliament. Shubaylat has argued that "institutional" Islamism is effectively a tool of the regime, which thereby has managed to "tame" the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>9</sup>

Shubaylat's strident criticism of the regime and its policies led to his arrest in 1992. In what amounts to a familiar pattern of curbing dissent in the Hashemite kingdom, Shubaylat was arrested, tried, convicted, and soon thereafter pardoned by the king. While this is nowhere near the level of ruthlessness one finds in other regional regimes, the message and latent threat to the opposition more generally is nonetheless clear. Having a criminal conviction also bars an individual

from running for office in the future, and the regime therefore managed to remove Shubaylat from parliamentary opposition permanently.

Unlike Shubaylat and other critics, the Muslim Brotherhood intended not only to compete in the elections, but also hoped ultimately to gain positions in government and reform state policy. In the 1989 elections, to the surprise of many in the Hashemite regime, the Muslim Brotherhood secured 22 parliamentary seats (out of a total of 80), while independent Islamists won an additional 12 seats. With a bloc of 34 seats in parliament, the Jordanian Islamist movement elected one of its most influential leaders, Dr. Abd al-Latif Arabiyyat, to be speaker of the house. For Arabiyyat, the events of 1989 served as a “wake-up call” for the Hashemite regime.<sup>10</sup> Prime Minister Mudar Badran, responding to the Islamist electoral victories, invited several Islamists into his government. This, however, led to a rift within the movement regarding a very important proposition: Should Islamists serve in the government at all?

Hardline members of the Islamist movement argued that this amounted to a kind of capitulation to the state, and in effect a contamination of the movement itself. Many left the Brotherhood over this issue, becoming part of Jordan’s longstanding tradition of independent Islamist thought and activism. Yet the more mainstream members of the Ikhwan saw serving as cabinet ministers as a well-deserved reward for years of organizational effort. Among this latter group were Abdallah Akaylah (minister of education), Yusuf al-Azm (minister of social development), Majid al-Khalifa (minister of justice), Zayd al-Kilani (minister of *awqaf* and religious affairs), and Adnan al-Jaljuli (minister of health).<sup>11</sup>

With five cabinet portfolios and leading a bloc of 34 parliamentary seats, the Muslim Brotherhood had accomplished an astounding political victory. This was tempered rather quickly, however, when public opinion turned against many of the measures that the Islamist ministers imposed. The most notorious of these included a failed attempt to ban alcohol

in the kingdom, sexual segregation in some governmental office buildings, and a ban (later rescinded) on fathers watching their daughters in competitive sports. It is important to note, here, that this too played into the state’s strategy. While the Hashemite regime had no way of knowing what specific policies would be implemented, regime officials were certain that the Islamist ministers--if given room to maneuver---would in fact rile public opinion against their various measures. The idea, in short, was to ease tensions by including the opposition in government, but also to allow them to fall flat in the face of a backlash in public opinion.<sup>12</sup>

In any event, the government itself was dissolved merely six months later, and replaced with an equally short-lived cabinet led by new Prime Minister Tahir al-Masri, a more liberal and progressive politician. This time, the Brotherhood rejected the few token ministries it was offered and instead worked to oust the Masri government in a no confidence vote. While the vote never carried, Masri’s position had become quickly unworkable, and once again the government was replaced.<sup>13</sup>

The regime clearly remained alarmed at the level of Islamist influence and electoral success, however, and government efforts thereafter turned on limiting Islamist successes in future elections. The regime therefore responded to the Islamist victories with a sweeping change of the electoral system: changing to a one-person one-vote structure with modified electoral districts. While the earlier system, which allowed Jordanians to vote for multiple MP’s (depending on how many would represent the given district) had perhaps exaggerated Islamist strength, the new system was designed to do precisely the reverse. In the 1993 elections, which followed the legalization of political parties in the kingdom, the Muslim Brotherhood did not directly participate, returning instead to its traditional role as political, social, and charitable movement. Instead, many Ikhwan members, and even Islamists outside the Brotherhood, formed and joined the IAF.<sup>14</sup> The IAF over time became, in effect, the political party wing of the Muslim

Brotherhood. As such, the IAF participated in the 1993 elections, but secured only 16 parliamentary seats, while independent Islamists dropped to a mere six seats. However, this drop off in representation appeared to be due more to the changed electoral law, rather than to a backlash against Islamist government policies.<sup>15</sup>

Following the drop in electoral strength in the 1993 elections, the Islamist movement demanded a repeal of the newer electoral system. They correctly argued that the districts themselves were unbalanced: over-representing more conservative, pro-regime rural areas, and under-representing more urban--and more Palestinian--areas that had provided key bases of support for Jordanian Islamism. When the government refused to comply with Islamist demands to change the electoral system, the IAF led a broad-based opposition coalition (including leftist and pan-Arab nationalist parties) in an 11-party boycott of the 1997 elections. The resulting parliament naturally proved to be overwhelmingly conservative, nationalist, and pro-Hashemite.<sup>16</sup> With only six independent Islamist MP's in the new parliament, and no MP's whatsoever from the IAF, Islamist strength and strategy shifted from parties and parliament, toward the professional associations instead. In short order, Islamist candidates won the leadership posts of almost every professional association in the kingdom (e.g. engineers, pharmacists, medical doctors), thereby creating a basis for Islamist political activism outside the halls of parliament, but very much within Jordanian civil society.<sup>17</sup>

## **KING ABDALLAH II AND THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT**

In 1999, King Hussein of Jordan died after a long battle with cancer. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Abdallah, who became King Abdallah II. While the succession itself had proceeded smoothly and peacefully, the same could not be said for regional politics and hence Jordan's immediate political environment. With the emergence of the second Palestinian uprising--or intifada--in

2000 and preparations looming for a second U.S. war on Iraq, the new Jordanian regime decided to put off part of the political liberalization process, by postponing parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2001.

Yet in 2003, after two years of postponements, Jordan held its fourth round of parliamentary elections since the start of the liberalization process in 1989. The 2003 elections were the first under King Abdallah II, and marked the return of the opposition to electoral politics. This time the IAF and the opposition parties eschewed the boycott tactics of 1997 and instead contested the elections, which were held under a new set of laws extending the number of parliamentary seats from 80 to 110, including a minimum of six seats to guarantee women's representation in parliament. Seventeen IAF members gained parliamentary seats. Interestingly, the IAF parliamentary deputies included Hayat al-Musani, the first woman elected to parliament under the quota system. In addition to the IAF bloc, five independent Islamists were also elected to parliament.<sup>18</sup>

While the IAF remained focused on its own Islamist political agenda, most legislation continued to emerge from the government itself, with the parliament serving as a debating forum that usually provided a legislative stamp of approval for government initiatives. The IAF had no success in achieving its broadest policy goals. These unfulfilled goals included implementing Shari'a (Islamic law) and abrogating the Jordan-Israel peace treaty.

Still, the IAF did align itself with more secular conservative forces to block repeated government attempts to change Jordan's laws regarding "honor crimes;" that is, crimes purportedly linked to family honor in which men kill female relatives who are believed to have in some way shamed the family. Jordan's monarchy itself has endorsed attempts to change the kingdom's otherwise lenient pattern of sentencing for these crimes. Yet the Islamist movement, in temporary alliances with other social conservatives in parliament, has consistently opposed attempts to change

the legal system regarding “crimes of honor.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Salafists, Jihadists, and “Jordan’s 9-11”*

While the Muslim Brotherhood and the IAF are the best organized, most recognizable faces of Islamism in Jordan, there also remain more subtle and even underground forms. Jordan’s Salafiyya movement, for example, has grown steadily since the 1980s. The term “Salafi” refers to the earliest Muslim communities and specifically the immediate companions of Muhammad. The Salafiyya movement, in fact, originally emerged from the reformist efforts of Islamic Modernist thinker Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in the nineteenth century. Yet in the late twentieth century the term Salafiyya has changed dramatically and perhaps even reversed the earlier emphasis on modernism and reform. Salafism today, in contrast, usually refers to a more hardline and puritanical approach to Islamic revivalism. Some versions of Salafism (although not all) have turned instead toward militancy, terrorism, and jihadi activism.

In the Jordanian case, as in many other countries, the rise in Salafi activity coincided with the end of the Afghani mujahidin war against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. This is, in short, a much more recent phenomenon than the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. Many credit the rise of a Salafi alternative (to both the Jordanian state and its more established Islamist opposition) to the arrival in Jordan of the influential Salafi Shaykh Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Bani. Shaykh al-Bani fled to the kingdom from Syria in 1979, as the Ba’thist state was deepening its crackdown on Sunni Islamists in Syria. In the words of Quintan Wiktorowicz, the arrival of al-Bani “precipitated an explosion of Salafi activism” as he essentially served as a “focal point” for Islamists seeking a return to what they viewed as a more authentic and traditional approach to Islam.<sup>20</sup>

Still, while the Salafi alternative has increased in strength in Jordan over time, it also remains of at least two minds. Some Salafists believe that radical change is needed

in Jordan, but they do not necessarily believe that jihad is either viable or appropriate. For others, jihad is the only alternative. Not surprisingly these latter Salafists include many returned veterans of the Afghan wars. The jihadi tendency within the Jordanian Salafi movement sees itself as *takfiri*; that is, those who declare the Hashemite state as *kafir*--unbelievers against whom jihad is no less than a duty. These Salafi jihadists are influenced not only by Shaykh al-Bani, but also by the earlier writings of thirteenth century Islamist Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya and twentieth century Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb.<sup>21</sup>

Wiktorowicz has argued that while the Muslim Brotherhood and IAF rely on formal organization and participation in political parties, professional associations, and charities, the Salafi movement has instead relied on informal networks for recruitment and activism. He further argues that many of Jordan’s religious scholars, the *ulama*, are themselves Salafists. The informal networks, meanwhile, allow Salafists to at least attempt to continue their activism under the radar of state surveillance.<sup>22</sup> Still, despite the rise in Salafiyya ideas and activity, most of Jordan’s Islamist movement remains more mainstream, reformist, and democratic, while the major terrorist threats have come largely from foreign al-Qa’ida militants.

The worst terrorist attack in Jordan occurred in November 2005, as noted at the outset of this article, as al-Qa’ida suicide bombers struck three luxury hotels in central Amman, killing 60 people--mostly Jordanians--and injuring more than 100. The IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood were among the first to respond to the tragedy by organizing anti-al-Qa’ida demonstrations in the capital. The demonstrations underscored the difference between moderate mainstream pro-democratic forms of Islamism (such as Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood) and militant global jihadi organizations (such as al-Qa’ida). The terrorists struck on the 9 November 2005--hence, it was literally “Jordan’s 9-11”--and all were ethnic Iraqis sent to Jordan merely days earlier on the orders of Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi. Zarqawi, formerly a Jordanian

national, had become the self-styled leader of al-Qa'ida in Iraq. The attack, it seems, was meant to punish Jordan for its closeness to the United States, among other grievances against the Hashemites.<sup>23</sup>

Jordanian intelligence services had claimed to have previously foiled no less than 150 other plots to public safety and security from militant Islamists affiliated with al-Qa'ida. Yet all earlier plots had involved Jordanian nationals, while the November 2005 bombings were carried out by Iraqi suicide bombers. These militants, unfortunately, managed to slip through the network of security and intelligence to carry out their attacks. Al-Qa'ida militants had, however, earlier struck on a more limited scale, including firing Katyusha rockets in Jordan's port city of Aqaba, killing one Jordanian soldier.<sup>24</sup>

The scale and barbarity of the Amman bombings, each of which targeted a wedding party taking place in a major (Western) hotel chain in central Amman, seemed to transform Jordanian public opinion regarding Islamist militancy and terrorism. In a poll conducted by the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies, responses to the same questions varied greatly between 2004 and December 2005—one month after the attacks. In the 2004 survey, 68 percent of Jordanians polled viewed al-Qa'ida as a "legitimate resistance organization." In 2005, that number had declined to 20 percent. Similarly, in 2004, only 10.6 percent labeled al-Qa'ida as a terrorist organization, while in 2005 that number had increased to 48.9 percent. When the pollsters added a distinction, and asked specifically about the Zarqawi-led organization within al-Qa'ida, 72.2 percent of Jordanians saw it as a terrorist organization rather than a legitimate resistance organization.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the hostility of most Jordanians, including Islamists, to the terrorist attacks, the Islamist movement in parliament nonetheless soon found itself squaring off with the government following a major cabinet reshuffle. The new government made clear that the monarchy had shifted entirely to security-mode. King Abdallah dismissed the

more moderate Prime Minister Adnan Badran, and replaced him with Ma'ruf Bakhit, Jordan's former ambassador to Israel and very much a security hawk. Conservative royalists retained the speakership posts in both the lower house of parliament (under Abd al-Hadi al-Majali) as well as the upper house or senate (under former prime minister Zayd al-Rifa'i). Neither man was known for his sympathies for Islamists, or for Palestinians for that matter.

Aware that security concerns had provided the pretext for a host of earlier deliberalization moves over the years, Islamist members of parliament urged the regime not to use the tragedy of the bombings as an excuse to issue new martial laws. The government, for its part, declared that counterterrorism would be a key policy focus and it called for "preemptive war" specifically on militant forms of Islamism. Although Muslim Brotherhood and IAF were not in any way militant, they nonetheless feared that new security measures might be used against them. In January 2006, seemingly on cue, the government issued charges against one of the IAF's leaders, Jamil Abu Bakr, for "harming the dignity of the state." The charges stemmed from articles on the IAF website that criticized the government tendency to appoint officials due mainly to connections (*wasta*) rather than expertise or parliamentary consultations. The charges were dropped the following month, but the sense of harassment remained. The regime meanwhile moved still further in its efforts to rein in more militant Islamism, including issuing a new law restricting preaching in mosques and issuing fatwas only to government-approved ulama. Finally, perhaps the most ominous sign was the new and decidedly elastic anti-terrorism law that seemed to greatly expand the roles, powers, and influence of the intelligence and police services in daily life.<sup>26</sup>

### ***The Hamas Factor in Jordanian Politics?***

With the sweeping victory of Hamas in Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006, a "Hamas factor" appeared to have reinvigorated Jordan's already well-organized and well-established Islamist movement. With



its emphasis on anti-corruption in its political campaign, as well as its maintenance of charities, clinics, and schools, Hamas was in many ways adopting the electoral strategies and tactics of Jordan's IAF and Muslim Brotherhood. Yet unlike Hamas, the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood do not have a militant wing, and instead focus on civilian party and interest group organization and remain very much a part of the pro-democratization movement in the kingdom. Hamas representatives were expelled from Jordan in 1999, when the kingdom severed ties and closed their offices.

Now, however, with the Hamas victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections, the IAF called on the Jordanian government to restore ties and recognize their achievement. Jordan's Islamists were also inspired by the relative success of Muslim Brotherhood candidates (running as independents) in Egyptian parliamentary elections as well as the rise of Islamist activists to power in neighboring Iraq. Jordanian Islamists, like their counterparts elsewhere, campaigned on platforms of clean government and inclusion, and their credibility in this area benefited from their already-established reputation for civic mindedness, based on the extensive Muslim Brotherhood network of charitable organizations.<sup>27</sup>

In the midst of this Islamist euphoria over the inspiring electoral successes of others, however, the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood did nothing to endear themselves to an already suspicious Hashemite regime, when Islamist activists chose to attend the Arab political parties conference held in Damascus in March 2006. Syrian President Bashar al-Asad hosted the conference on behalf of Syria's Ba'thist regime. Thus Jordanian Islamists attended an event that banned Islamists from Syria itself. The point was not lost on Syria's exiled Muslim Brotherhood, which lambasted the IAF for its lack of solidarity and questionable judgment.

The IAF meanwhile found itself also attacked by the Jordanian government, when President Asad mockingly referred to the Hashemite regime's "Jordan First" policy. Asad coupled "Jordan First" with Lebanon's

recently unveiled "Lebanon First" agenda, suggesting that such narrow visions meant that surely the United States or Israel lurked as a close second. While the Jordanian press castigated the Syrian regime for arrogance and a long list of other complaints, the Hashemite regime remained angered that the Jordanians present at the speech had either failed to refute Asad's comments, or worse, had actually applauded.<sup>28</sup>

For many Islamists, the Hamas victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections was inspiring, but it was also a reminder of their comparative limitations. Hamas' electoral win translated immediately into a new Hamas-led government and cabinet. Within Jordan, in contrast, almost two decades of Islamist electoral strategies had indeed translated to some success, but to no chance whatsoever to form an IAF government in Jordan. After the Hamas victory, however, a new boldness entered the rhetoric of some IAF leaders, who now announced their new political program. Some aspects remain cornerstones of earlier programs: fully implementing Shari'a law, abandoning the Wadi Araba treaty, ending normalization with Israel.<sup>29</sup> Yet others included demands to stop attempting to "downsize" the Islamist movement through electoral laws designed to minimize their representation. Azzam al-Hunaydi, the leader of the IAF bloc within parliament, minced no words when he stated flatly that "that which faces the Islamic movement--in terms of attempts at marginalization and exclusion, tailoring of laws and the policy of ceilings--will not last indefinitely." He may have caught the attention of Jordan's security-focused regime when he added even more starkly that "the time of downsizing, marginalization, showing scorn for people and being captive to foreigners will end soon."<sup>30</sup>

In the view of Hunaydi and many other Islamist activists, Jordan remained committed to the wrong paths in both domestic and foreign policy. The IAF therefore presented itself as an alternative approach, and one that was ready to govern. The "Hamas effect," in short, had provided the Jordanian Islamist movement with a renewed optimism.<sup>31</sup> IAF

deputies charged that in freer and fairer elections, they might win 40 to 50 percent of the vote. With Islamists rising to prominence and power through nearby elections--Hizballah in Lebanon, various Islamist Shi'a parties in Iraq, and Hamas in the Palestinian territories--Jordanian Islamists argued that they might now be poised to win an outright majority in parliament. Given Jordan's heavily gerrymandered electoral districts, which favor rural over urban districts (and hence under-represent predominantly Palestinian and Islamist areas of the kingdom), the IAF optimism may be unfounded. Even aside from gerrymandered districts, the party has never received close to half the overall votes. Yet under a new and more even-handed electoral law, they would nonetheless be likely to do fairly well. Indeed, IAF and Muslim Brotherhood officials made very clear their overall view of the current system, when they repeatedly called on the regime to issue a new "*democratic elections law*" (emphasis added).<sup>32</sup>

In addition to concerns about the electoral system, Jordanian Islamists also insisted that governments should then be drawn from parliament in a truer model of a parliamentary system, rather than royally-appointed pending only the formality of parliamentary approval. IAF deputies remained certain that their "street" support greatly exceeded their actual parliamentary power. In the wrangling within Jordanian politics over the next and "final" law on parties and elections, the IAF insisted that hinted bans on religiously-based parties remain off the table, while a more truly democratic election law remains very much an IAF interest, so that the alleged Islamist street majority could one day become a governing coalition.

This issue of linking elections to actual governance was a key sticking point in the struggle between the government and its opposition, when they bargained over the ground rules for the next rounds of parliamentary elections. Yet in effect, the government and its opponents were also debating the future nature of the Jordanian state itself.

### ***Islamists and the 2007 Jordanian Elections***

The November 2007 national parliamentary elections followed an earlier round of municipal elections, held throughout the kingdom in July 2007. If that earlier set of elections was viewed as a harbinger of things to come, its conclusion did not encourage the Islamists. Amidst widespread charges of vote-rigging, the IAF announced its withdrawal from the process, but only on election day itself. The government quickly argued that the Islamists were merely attempting to save face in the midst of a resounding electoral defeat, while the Islamist movement, in contrast, insisted that the regime was engaged in an elaborate process of vote-rigging. Both sides may have had a point. At issue was the practice of busing soldiers to polling places, who would then vote in very large numbers, presumably tipping the scales to pro-government candidates even in Islamist strongholds like Irbid and Zarqa. The Islamists therefore felt that they were being systematically under-represented, and that this was part of a broader process to sideline them in Jordanian politics and society. Indeed, the year before, in 2006, the regime had even dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood's main means of distributing its social welfare programs and funds: the Islamic Center Charity.<sup>33</sup>

It was therefore in an atmosphere of increasing wariness, and even mutual hostility between the state and the Islamist movement, that the national election campaign began. This tense context only exacerbated divisions within the Islamist movement itself, particularly between hawks and doves, regarding tactics and strategy, if not policy. The dovish and moderate wing of the movement, which had for so long maintained a level of understanding with the Hashemite state, even negotiated with the government in an attempt to allay the regime's fears of the hawks. Indeed, Jordan's intelligence services seemed to view the hawkish wing, led by IAF Secretary General Zaki Bani-Irshayd, as increasingly a de facto Jordanian Hamas-style

movement operating within the broader Islamist framework.<sup>34</sup>

The moderate wing agreed to field a mere 22 candidates (down from the usual 30 or so) in the national elections and even ensured that most of these would be from the dovish wings of the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood. Having secured 17 seats in the previous parliament, the Islamist movement expected to retain its earlier strength at minimum. Yet when the votes were counted, Islamist representation (out of a parliament of 110) had plummeted to only six seats. More surprisingly, no Islamist candidates were elected in key political bases such as Irbid and Zarqa.<sup>35</sup> Once again, the recriminations flowed swiftly.

The IAF and Muslim Brotherhood leaders each accused the government of fraud and vote-rigging. Specifically, they argued that vote-buying schemes were widespread, with the government allegedly ignoring widespread irregularities.<sup>36</sup> The recriminations did not stop there, however, but resurfaced within the Islamist movement itself. Hawks such as Bani-Irshayd, who had been so skeptical of the process in the first place, accused moderates of losing the elections for the Islamist movement. The attempt of the moderates to work with the regime appeared to have backfired. In his analysis of state survival strategies in Jordan, Asher Susser has argued that the 2007 election outcome was the result, in effect, of the more hawkish Islamist elements greatly overplaying their hand, combined with a pronounced sharp reaction of a state that was in a defensive and even “punitive” mood. “The attempt by the doves in the movement to come to an understanding with the government at the last minute was essentially rebuffed,” Susser argues, “The hawks had crossed a line, and the Islamists as a whole were going to be taught a lesson.”<sup>37</sup>

For both sides the immediate regional context was critical. Islamist successes in elections in Gaza, the West Bank, Egypt, Lebanon, and even Turkey seemed to prompt the Jordanian IAF to push for far more than the Jordanian Islamist movement had heretofore achieved, or been allowed to achieve. While the Hashemite regime, in

contrast, felt hard-pressed to contain what they viewed as a Hamas-like shift within Jordanian Islamism. Jordanian analyst Hasan Barari, while acknowledging the probability of state electioneering, has also argued that the major factor may have been a shift in Jordanian public opinion itself, especially in the wake of the 2005 Amman bombings.<sup>38</sup> Despite the moderation and reformism of most of Jordan’s Islamist movement, there may have been some level of public backlash and impatience with Islamists in general.

The main victims of the elections, however, may have been—not simply Islamists—but *moderate* Islamists. The government’s strategy appeared to be shifting beyond containment of Islamism in the kingdom, and towards a more active and even aggressive strategy of disrupting the movement, and deepening intra-Islamist divisions. The question, of course, is whether this electoral disaster for the Islamist movement leads it, ultimately, to itself pursue its traditional loyal opposition strategy, or shift to a more radical and more confrontational approach to the Hashemite state.

## CONCLUSIONS

For more than 60 years, the Hashemite monarchy and its mainstream Islamist movement have maintained a cooperative relationship. In recent years, however, a pattern of deliberalization threatened to erode that long pattern of Islamist loyal opposition to the monarchy and the state. The monarchy saw these measures as necessary, given the extreme and even violent circumstances in the region. Jordan remained wedged between violence in neighboring states: that is, between a Palestinian uprising and Israeli military responses, to the west, while to the east, Iraq was mired in war, occupation, insurgency, and civil strife.

After the 2005 al-Qa’ida bombings in the capital itself, the regime’s already-established security emphases simply became that much stronger. Yet the danger remained that the regime’s security concerns were effectively undermining Jordan’s once-heralded process of political liberalization and democratization.

The regime's tolerance for Islamist dissent, for example, was limited indeed. When several IAF members of parliament paid a condolence call to the family of the late Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (killed in Iraq in 2006), they were soon arrested and tried with crimes against the state. The arrested MP's included Ali Abu Sukkar, Ja'far Hurani, and Muhammad Abu Faris. Abu Faris angered the regime still further (and indeed infuriated Jordanian public opinion as well) when, in an interview with the satellite television station al-Arabiyya, he stated that Zarqawi was a martyr, but that the victims of the Amman bombings were not.<sup>39</sup> The three deputies were convicted of inciting terrorism, but in a very familiar pattern of reining in dissent in Hashemite Jordan, they were later pardoned and released.

Many Islamists read this episode as merely a small part of an overall campaign against them. Moreover, while Abu Faris is indeed more radical than most Islamists active in Jordanian public life, the regime's general pattern of actions seemed to be directed not simply toward individuals, but rather against the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood more broadly. While the regime would reject this interpretation, many in Jordan's mainstream Islamist movement would not. The Islamist movement itself, in the meantime, remained divided and indeed strained by the fallout and recriminations from the disastrous 2007 parliamentary elections.

Even as the hawks attempted to sideline moderates, calling for their resignations and blaming them for the loss, the moderate leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood managed to respond firmly. In April 2008, the internal party court within the Brotherhood officially suspended radicals Zaki Bani-Irshayd and Muhammad Abu Faris for one year from membership in the powerful Shura council that runs the organization.<sup>40</sup> Yet Bani-Irshayd retained his position as secretary general of the IAF, while the hardline Hammam al-Sa'id was elected to be the new general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood. Just as importantly, however, the moderates reaffirmed their position by securing half of the seats on the Brotherhood's ruling Shura

council and by electing moderate leader Abd al-Latif al-Arabiyyat as head of the council itself. The Shura council, therefore, continues to reflect the divisions within the Islamist movement itself. The IAF, for its part, had to scramble to make the deadline to comply with a new political parties law in the kingdom. While Jordanian Islamists objected to the newer and more restrictive approach to political parties, the IAF did manage in April 2008 to renew its license and hence retain its legal status in Jordan. As the discussion above makes clear, however, the debates over tactics, strategy, and the role of Islamism in Jordanian politics nonetheless continued, both within the Islamist movement and within the Hashemite regime itself.

Jordanian government officials often argue that any restrictive measures are actually quite moderate (when compared to most other states in the Middle East) and that they are simply prudent given the extreme circumstances in the region.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, many in the Islamist movement feel that the longstanding cooperation between reformist Islamism and the monarchy may be in decline. These vastly different interpretations are a key issue for the future of Jordanian politics, as they will in turn affect the policies and tactics of both government and opposition in Jordan. There is, in short, a danger here that the regime's various deliberalization moves in recent years (all made in the name of national security) may ultimately serve to alienate the moderates who make up the overwhelming majority of Jordan's Islamist activists, unwittingly empowering the heretofore smaller but more militant alternatives.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Islamists, the State, and Cooperation in Jordan," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1999), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Marion Boulby, *The Muslim Brotherhood and the Kings of Jordan* (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Islamists, the State, and Cooperation in Jordan," pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 7. On the linkage between charitable organizations and Islamist movements, see in particular Janine Clark, *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, "Peace, Bread, and Riots: Jordan and the International Monetary Fund," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 54-66.

<sup>6</sup> Paul L. Scham and Russell E. Lucas, "'Normalization' and 'Anti-Normalization' in Jordan: The Public Debate," *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2003), pp. 141-64.

<sup>7</sup> Glenn Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1998), pp. 387-410.

<sup>8</sup> For comparative analysis of the elections, see Curtis R. Ryan, "Elections and Parliamentary Democratization in Jordan," *Democratization*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1998), pp. 194-214. On the entire process of political and economic transitions, see Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Islamists, the State, and Cooperation in Jordan," p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Author's interview with Abd al-Latif Arabiyyat, Amman, Jordan, February 25, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> Author's interviews with Islamist activists and Jordanian government officials, Amman, Jordan, March 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Author's interviews with former Prime Minister Tahir al-Masri, Amman, Jordan, March 2, 1993 and July 14, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> *Dalil al-Hayat al-Hizbiyya fi al-Urdun: Hizb Jabha al-Amal al-Islami* [Guide to Party Life in Jordan: The Islamic Action Front Party], (Amman: al-Urdun al-Jadid Research Center, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Abla Amawi, "The 1993 Elections in Jordan," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1994), pp. 15-27.

<sup>16</sup> *Dirasat fi al-Intakhabat al-Niyabiyya al-Urduniyya* [Studies in the 1997 Representative [Parliamentary] Elections], (Amman: al-Urdun al-Jadid Research Center, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> On women and the Jordanian Islamist movement, see Lisa Taraki, "Islam is the Solution: Jordanian Islamists and the Dilemma of the Modern Woman," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (1995), pp. 643-61. On the 2003 Jordanian elections and their implications, see Curtis R. Ryan and Jillian Schwedler, "Return to Democratization or New Hybrid Regime? The 2003 Elections in Jordan," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2004), pp. 138-51.

<sup>19</sup> This draws on an earlier discussion of Islamist activism within parliamentary politics. See Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan: Islamic Action Front Presses for Role in Governing," *Arab Reform Bulletin*, February 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The Salafi Movement in Jordan," *International Journal*

of *Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2000), p. 222.

<sup>21</sup> Wiktorowicz, "The Salafi Movement in Jordan," pp. 222-26.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp. 219-20.

<sup>23</sup> International Crisis Group, "Jordan's 9/11: Dealing with Jihadi Islamism," *Middle East Report*, No. 47 (November 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Sana Abdallah, "Al-Qaida Still Haunts Jordan," United Press International, March 5, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Fares Braizat, *Post-Amman Attacks: Jordanian Public Opinion and Terrorism* (Amman: Public Polling Unit, Center for Strategic Studies, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Ryan, "Jordan: Islamic Action Front Presses for Role in Governing."

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Williams, "Political Islam's Opportunity in Jordan," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> *Al-Arab al-Yawm*, March 11, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Ryan, "Jordan: Islamic Action Front Presses for Role in Governing."

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Hayat*, January 30, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Thanassis Cambanis, "Jordan's Islamists see a Path to Political Power," *Boston Globe*, March 21, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> *Jordan Times*, January 24, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Asher Susser, "Jordan: Preserving Domestic Order in a Setting of Regional Turmoil," *Middle East Brief*, No. 27 (Waltham, MA: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, March 2008), pp. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> Susser, "Jordan," pp. 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad Ibn Hussein, "Islamists Dealt Heavy Blow in Elections," *Jordan Times*, November 22, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Sabil*, November 27, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Susser, "Jordan," p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Hassan Barari, "Elections in Jordan: Poor Showing for Islamists," *Policy Watch*, No. 1317 (Washington Institute for Near East Studies, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> *Jordan Times*, July 25, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> *Al-Arab al-Yawm*, April 23, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Author's interviews with Jordanian government officials, Amman, Jordan, May 2005.